New Nouveau Brunswick CANADA

News Release

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Human Rights Commission

Human rights award recipients (99/12/01)

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EDITOR'S NOTE-- The 1999 Human Rights Awards will be presented to Claudia Simon and Gilbert Sewell on Wednesday, Dec. 8, at Old Government House in Fredericton beginning at 3 p.m.

FREDERICTION (CNB) -- The recipients of the 1999 New Brunswick Human Rights Awards are Claudia Simon of Big Cove First Nation and Gilbert Sewell of Pabineau First Nation.

"Mrs. Simon and Mr. Sewell are outstanding role models who have dedicated their lives to the advancement of aboriginal rights and well- being of aboriginal people in New Brunswick. They are an inspiration to all of us," Constantine Passaris, chairperson of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission said.

"Our commission has a strong commitment to the protection and promotion of aboriginal rights. We believe that in New Brunswick, embracing and building on our diversity enhances our economic and social opportunities," Passaris added. "It is indeed fitting that on the eve of a new millennium we celebrate the achievements and contributions of Mrs. Simon and Mr. Sewell, two aboriginal rights activists whose ancestors laid the foundation for our province and our country."

Claudia Simon, who has degrees in education and health, was the first native teacher at the Big Cove School and later became its vice- president. She is now director of health at the Big Cove Health Centre, where she seeks to improve health care services in order to enhance the holistic well-being of her community. Simon was involved in negotiations that led to the building of a modern health facility and a traditional healing lodge. She also played a role in promoting a telemedicine service and a health information service, as well as community-based mental health programs and community development programs.

"I value a team approach and believe in delivery of community-based programs and services, using both the modern and native cultural approaches, to help my people restore their pride, dignity and self-respect," Simon said.

Gilbert Sewell is an elder of the Pabineau First Nation and a renowned storyteller of native folklore and history. He has dedicated himself to having a positive influence on the lives of youth by promoting native culture through talks and demonstrations. He has delivered his ongoing message of respect and dignity to youth, multicultural groups, and tour groups from around the world.

Sewell has also had a weekly CBC radio program and has helped identify sacred native sites. He has

also provided some content for the CD-ROM, Exploring an Ancient Civilization of the North American Indian. When asked what message he wanted to deliver to those attending the award ceremony, Sewell said, "The circle is never ending. We are all part of this. Respect one another."

In addition, Sewell was formerly chief of the Pabineau First Nation, the president of the Union of New Brunswick Indians and an advisor and acting regional director with the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. In his military service to Canada during the 1950's, Sewell was a member of the Lord Strathcona Horse tank regiment. He trained at Camp Borden in Ontario and served three years in Alberta. During that time, he was proud to be part of an honour guard for Queen Elizabeth when she visited in Canada. He is currently a guide, small business owner, Mi'kmaq language instructor and bus driver for his community.

The human rights award was established by the Commission in 1988 to mark the 40th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is awarded each year around Dec. 10, which is Human Rights Day. The award is given to a New Brunswick individual or group that has shown outstanding effort, achievement and leadership on a volunteer basis in the promotion of human rights and, as such, serves as an example to all New Brunswickers.

The awards will be presented by Labour Minister Norman McFarlane and Aboriginal Affairs Minister Brad Green at a ceremony hosted by New Brunswick Lt.-Gov. Marilyn Trenholme Counsell.

99/12/01

MEDIA CONTACTS: Constantine Passaris, New Brunswick Human Rights Commission chair, 506-453-2301;Claudia Simon, recipient 506- 523-8227;Gilbert Sewell, recipient 506- 548-1017.

For more information about the Human Rights Commission http://www.gnb.ca/hrc-cdp/e/

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